

O & M

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IN THE  
**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**

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## O & M IN THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

[Text of a lecture delivered by Shri R.K. Rangan, Deputy Director, O & M Division, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, on May 3, 1960, at "Short-term Course on Local Government" organised under the auspices of the Indian Institute of Public Administration.]

Organisation & Methods in the Government of India is of very recent origin. It does not mean that there was no "Organisation" or "Methods" in the Government of India earlier or they were neglected. Far from it. In fact, the administration of this country before Independence was efficient; we inherited a sound administrative machinery buttressed by clearly defined methods and procedures for transacting business and manned by fully trained and equipped personnel, reputed for their efficiency, loyalty and integrity. A considerable amount of thought by our predecessors had gone into the formulation of forms and methods in the administration and the training and equipment of the personnel for it. Many of these continue to be in vogue even now. [In fact, the procedures in the Secretariat have not changed materially since those days; but the nature and functions of administration then were comparatively simple, personnel were of high calibre, fully equipped by training and experience for the job, volume of business transacted was much smaller and the actual time taken for the disposal of the business had less emphasis than now.]

The position has considerably changed since then. During and immediately after the war, there was considerable dilution in the trained and equipped personnel. The tremendous consequences of partition and transfer of power in the country, and the vast strides in development envisaged by the Five Year Plans with the acceptance of the goal of Welfare State have put the entire administration to the severest test in the annals of any country in the world.

done in different sections and is in a position to make comparisons and realistic appraisals and suggest improvements. And like most work, O & M work has also its special techniques and requires specialisation. To explain these techniques, in brief, I cannot do better than to repeat what Shri K. Radhakrishnan, ICS., Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Madhya Pradesh said to Under Secretaries of that Government on the 28th March 1959 when he addressed them on "Functions of O & M".

From the 'methods' point of view, the object is to increase efficiency, that is to secure the maximum return for the expenditure of a given amount of energy and resources. In other words, the attention to methods is primarily for the purpose of increasing the productivity of the individuals. As a convenient generalisation, therefore, it may be said that the 'methods' part of the O & M work gives more attention to the individual's performance while the 'organisation' part of its work aims at knitting together the various individuals into an effective and cohesive group with reference to the objective for which the various persons have been brought together in that group.

From the point of view of worker-productivity, attention is to be given to things like work simplification, work flow and prescription of standards. Work simplification involves an analysis of the distribution of work to see what activities take most time, whether any of the tasks that are being performed are unimportant or unnecessary, whether specialised skills that are available are fully utilised, whether employees are required to do too many unrelated tasks with the result that there is waste of time and energy because of the mental and other adjustments necessary for changing over from one task to another which is not related to it, whether too many persons are expected to do the same thing with the result that there is what is called 'buck-passing' and finally whether the work-load is distributed reasonably evenly.

By work flow is meant that the work should always flow forward and there should not be too many unnecessary halts and reversals of step or too much of criss-crossing. The

proper analogy is that of a well-planned traffic roundabout at the intersection of roads to ensure that traffic is always moving forward and is not frequently halted. For examining the work flow, it has to be ascertained whether each step in the procedure is really necessary, whether some of them can be combined as, for example, insisting on simple drafts conveying decisions in accordance with precedents being put up along with the initial noting instead of being done subsequent to the decision, whether each step in the process is in proper sequence and, finally, how the time factor involved in the performance of each step can be reduced.

The prescription of standards for work performance is not an easy matter and requires considerable detailed study. Since there are wide variations in individual capacities, the determination of standards also calls for sound judgment. The aim should be not to set a standard related to the performance of the most gifted individual which obviously would be beyond the capacity of the bulk of the persons working in that department or section, nor to take laggards as the standard and thereby give less to the bulk of the people than they are capable of doing. Despite the difficulties, some attempt has to be made to secure that everyone has a full day's work and that neither persons nor facilities remain unutilised.

Most of the work of government is done on paper and forms and returns are one of the standard methods of collecting information and watching performance. Like all paper activities, these have a tendency to proliferate beyond the real need of the situation and therefore O & M does periodically give attention to these matters and takes them up for review. In some organisations, the standardisation of forms and the prescription of new forms are given exclusively to O & M.

O & M measures, while they are primarily designed to increase efficiency, are in general conducive to economy but it is not possible to state how much amount has been saved through such measures, because it is very often not practicable to assess the amount of economy secured as a result of a particular O & M measure, the economy being effected indirectly.

## III

The organisation in the Government of India has been conceived as a collective and co-operative enterprise in which the main effort would come from the O & M Unit in the Ministries while the Central O & M Division would supply the necessary leadership and drive. The Central O & M Division has no elaborate staff of its own. It functions primarily through the O & M cells set up in each Ministry/Department under the charge of one of its existing officers, generally of the grade of Deputy Secretary, designated as O & M officer, who looks after this work usually in addition to other duties. The O & M officers are expected to apply their minds to the factors impeding the speed and the efficiency of the organisations with which they are concerned.

The Director, O & M, who is a part-time officer of the status of Joint Secretary to the Government of India, keeps in touch with the O & M officers and brings them together at periodical meetings which provide a forum for exchange of ideas and experience and for evolving solutions to common drawbacks and deficiencies. The Deputy Director, O & M, pays informal visits to Ministries/Offices to make random checks to see how far the prescribed procedures are being correctly followed and to give advice on matters of detail on the spot. He holds informal discussions with officers and assists them in locating and removing the causes which adversely affect the speed or quality of work. There is also an Officer on Special Duty in the Central O & M Division who undertakes special studies of problems of a general nature which concern more than one Department. In addition, there are two officers of the status of Under Secretary to the Government of India, four Section Officers and a few Assistants and Clerks.

The Central O & M Division maintains a constant watch on the working of the rules, regulations and procedures in the various Departments. When it is noticed that application of any rule, regulation or procedure results in avoidable delays in taking decisions or involves hardships to members of the public or the staff, the O & M Division initiates a

change in the rule, regulation or procedure to eliminate the delays or difficulties. The day-to-day work of the O & M cells includes the making of inspections, the collection of data relating to speed of disposal of work, examination of cases involving delays, devising improvements in procedures, etc. There are at present 67 O & M cells functioning in the different Ministries, Departments and Offices.

#### IV

It is difficult in this short talk to explain in any detail the activities of the O & M in the Government of India and the results achieved thereby. As stated earlier, the O & M was introduced in India when the efficiency of the administrative machinery was at a fairly low ebb. With the large increase in the number of offices and the inadequacy of the nature of the personnel manning them, there was a general neglect of the office procedure which was followed before the war and the supervision and control of the work of Government business was also not adequate. Therefore, in the initial stages the O & M activities had three-fold objectives:

- | (i) to ascertain the actual condition of the working of the Government offices and to detect defects and deficiencies;
- (ii) to lay down a common system of office procedure in place of one which was falling into disuse; and
- (iii) to make all concerned conscious of the need for introducing efficiency in Government offices. |

In order to achieve these objectives, each O & M officer was asked to select one Section in his Ministry and to inspect it thoroughly. He was also required to make detailed analytical study of some cases from his Ministry. This made him, as also other officers, conscious of the prevailing inefficiency and the need for determined effort to combat it. It also showed that the fault, on the whole, lay not so much in the existing organisation and procedures as in the failure to work the existing system properly. In the light of the experience so gained and rules and practices already in vogue,

for the first time in the history of the Secretariat, a standard volume designated "Manual of Office Procedure" laying down a uniform procedure for disposal of Government business was issued by the O & M Division in 1955.

One of the most common complaints against the administrative machinery in India is the delay in the transaction of Government business and in the final disposal of communications from the public. There were, however, no statistics to give an accurate picture of the final disposal of Government business and the comparative performance of different Sections and Ministries. A simple control mechanism was accordingly introduced in July 1954, for getting an objective picture of the speed of disposal of work. For this purpose, a rather original conception of "primary" receipts was introduced in compiling these data. Until then, each communication, of whatever nature, was considered as a separate receipt and any interim action thereon was treated as disposal of the case. Thus, if a reference was received from a member of the public by a Ministry and the information had to be collected from an attached or subordinate office, so far as the Ministry was concerned, the reference was supposed to have been disposed of by calling for the necessary information from that office. Of course, reminders were sent, or supposed to be sent, if no reply was received in time but, by and large, no attempt was made to have an overall picture of the *final* disposal of the receipt, i.e., giving a final reply to the party initiating the correspondence. For the purpose of the arrears reports, the interim disposal was treated as disposal. From the point of view of the public, however, it is not sufficient that the information has been called for from another office in time; what is of interest to him is the final reply to his letter. In order to have a clear picture of action on these lines, the receipts were classified as "primary" or "subsidiary" receipts depending upon their nature. "Primary" receipts are those which provide a starting point for initial action and the interval from the date of receipt of such communication and date of completion of final action represents time for their disposal. All other receipts of interim type such as receipt

of information from other offices, reminders from the originator of the "primary" receipt and the like for the purpose of the disposal of "primary" receipts are classified as "subsidiary" receipts. Each Ministry now maintains a "Control Chart" showing the time taken in terms of weeks for the final disposal of the "primary" receipts. The introduction of this Control Chart focussed the attention of the Departments on disposing matters finally and has thus changed the emphasis in the departmental routine. Statistics collected with the aid of this Control Chart show that the continued application of the O & M measures has brought about an appreciable improvement in the speed and disposal of work in many Ministries and Departments.

Apart from this "Control Chart", two other statements form an integral part of the O & M control mechanism, viz.,

- (i) Weekly statement of receipts and cases pending action by dealing hands; and
- (ii) Monthly statement of cases pending disposal for more than a month.

The first is designed to show the weekly intake and output of each Assistant in a section; and the second to show what cases are undisposed of for more than a month and why. These statements between them bring to light every kind of delay and have proved helpful in locating the defects and expediting the disposal of cases.

Mere issue of instructions regarding procedures to be followed is not of much use unless it is ensured that these are also being observed. Periodical inspections of sections as a means of maintaining efficiency have been made from time to time. For undertaking these inspections, the O & M Division has devised questionnaires which the inspecting officers have to answer. Each section has to be inspected quarterly by the Under Secretary-in-charge and once a year by the Deputy Secretary.

O & M officers are also expected to do their share of inspection work. During the period March 1955 to the end of December 1959, the Deputy Director of the Central

O & M Division inspected over 700 sections in the various Ministries and Departments including offices located in mofussil centres.

## V

It is not enough that the work should be disposed of quickly; it is essential that it should also be properly done. The emphasis on speed, it was realised, was likely to discount quality and accordingly the O & M Division instituted what are called as "Quality control drives". Senior officers of the various Ministries were called upon periodically to make a note of the quality of the noting and drafting and also the necessity of the various steps taken by the lower staff in regard to cases which come up for their consideration during the period of the drive.

The practice of holding meetings of the O & M officers of the various Ministries to discuss problems of common concern has been a regular feature of O & M work. The Ministries also hold periodical staff meetings for reviewing the state of work within the Ministries. The O & M Division studies the minutes of these meetings and brings to the notice of O & M officers of other Ministries and Departments matters which are of common interest. An analysis of the statistics received in the Division shows that good gains have been made in the speed of disposal of work in those Ministries and offices where such monthly meetings have been a regular feature.

As the facilities available in the Secretariat Training School were found to be inadequate to deal with all the staff which required to be trained, O & M officers in the Ministries were advised to start internal training classes for newly recruited lower division clerks. A standard syllabus was evolved which could be adopted, with suitable modifications by all the Ministries. About 6,000 clerks have so far been trained under this system.

The O & M Division, in collaboration with the Special Reorganisation Unit of the Union Ministry of Finance,

imparted training in the techniques of work-study to 22 selected Section Officers, in two batches, during the year 1958. This training now continues to be given systematically by the Special Reorganisation Unit.

The first round of inspections initiated by the O & M Division revealed huge arrears in the recording and indexing of files. This hindered the easy availability of current papers and was one of the reasons leading to delays and inefficiency. Special teams were set up at the instance of the O & M Division for clearing those arrears. Over 19 lakh files were recorded and indexed in five years, leaving a balance of just over a lakh of files still to be attended to at the end of that period.

To avoid too much of noting, counter-noting and passing of files, O & M Division has enjoined on the Ministries that more use should be made of the method of personal discussions in inter-departmental consultations.

To ensure that the record of the O & M performance of the sections is maintained on a uniform pattern, a common form of "Dossier" to be used by all the Ministries and Offices has been devised. The Dossier keeps the O & M officer informed about the latest position of the state of work in every section in his Ministry or Office; and enables him to take suitable remedial measures as soon as signs of deterioration are noticed.

Inspections and case studies showed that delays in the disposal of cases were frequently due to the time taken in locating and putting up precedents. O & M Division advised the Ministries to prepare, in respect of each suitable subject dealt with by them, a "Standing Guard File" containing a record of the principles and policy followed in the past, the models of forms used in the issue of orders, notifications, etc., and copies of orders on the subject. The O & M Division itself prepared and circulated guard files on "Deputations and Delegations Abroad", "Transfer of Central Government Employees to Foreign Service", and "Appointment of non-Indians".

A Handbook for Establishment Officers dealing with some of the questions which generally arise at various stages of establishment work and containing, for ready reference, the rules, regulations and Government orders which provide the answers was published. The publication of the Handbook has helped in reducing the number of inter-departmental references.

The O & M Division has published, in the form of a convenient pamphlet for ready reference, a list of financial and cognate powers delegated to the various administrative authorities. This is intended to reduce the time spent in the section in looking up the relevant rules, regulations, orders, etc., which are of constant application.

Delegation is the art of getting things done through others. In actual practice, it was found that in many cases avoidable references were being made to the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Works, Housing and Supply even on small matters. In 1954, the financial and cognate powers of the Administrative Ministries and of Heads of Departments were reviewed by the O & M Division, and, as a result, wider powers were delegated by the Finance Ministry in a large number of cases. Similarly, the Home Ministry made delegations of certain administrative powers in such matters as the grant of extension of service to government servants, re-employment of retired persons, appointment of non-Indians, etc. The Ministry of Works, Housing and Supply also delegated wider powers to the other Ministries for incurring expenditure on the servicing, maintenance and upkeep of typewriters, etc.

The revised arrangements for budgetary and financial control introduced in August 1958 have conferred wide financial powers on the Administrative Ministries. The question of enlarging those powers further is under examination. The Administrative Ministries have been requested to delegate in their turn as much power as possible to the Heads of Departments and other subordinate authorities.

In order to reduce the number of stages through which cases have to pass before reaching the decision-taking level, the O & M Division has advised the Ministries to adopt the

practice of "level-jumping", i.e., reduction in the number of stages in the hierarchy through which a file has to pass up to the place where a decision is reached. It has been suggested to the Ministries that as a general rule not more than two officers should note on a case.

## VI

The O & M Division is trying out, on an experimental basis, the reconstitution of the Secretariat sections to eliminate all noting by Assistants and Clerks. The new type sections, known as Pilot Sections, are functioning in a number of Ministries. The first "consideration" and "note" on a receipt in these sections is given by a Section Officer who is expected to dispose of, at his own level, a larger proportion of cases than before. Cases requiring higher consideration are to be sent by him, as far as possible, direct to the appropriate officer at the decision-making level.

The messenger service system, which is intended to replace the present system of Jamadars and peons, was first introduced in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry in January 1958. The system is now being tried out in the Planning Commission, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Co-operation and the Ministry of Defence and several other Departments. The O & M Division is trying to get the system introduced in other Ministries and Departments also, particularly in those which have been allotted compact accommodation.

The Cabinet decided in 1957 that whenever a new activity was undertaken, or a new office or branch was opened, the O & M Division should be consulted regarding the organisation and methods most suitable for the office, before any staff was appointed. As a result, the Central O & M Division has been consulted and has given useful advice in a number of such cases.

A number of procedural reforms have been introduced at the instance of the O & M Division to correct defects brought to light by experience or as a result of inspections or special studies. They relate to such diverse matters as the

handling of dak, receipt of papers addressed to officers absent on tour or leave, circulation of tour programmes, the maintenance of reminder diaries, monthly progress returns of quasi-permanency cases, direct correspondence between Ministries and Heads of Departments under other Ministries, the prompt supply of Government reports, publications, etc., to the public, the disposal of audit objections, validation of identity cards, the drawal of washing allowance for Class IV servants, etc.

The O & M Division also deals with the question of revising existing forms whenever any deficiency in these forms is brought to light or when it is found that a change in a form is likely to expedite the disposal of work.

The Central O & M Division has been following the policy of setting up special study groups consisting of selected O & M officers to examine O & M problems relating to more than one Ministry. Some of the questions which have been studied in this way, with useful results, are the strength of Lower Division Clerks in normal Secretariat sections, delays in the issue of quasi-permanency certificates, delays in the disbursement of leave salary, delays in the disbursement of pay on first appointment, transfer or promotion, difficulties in the procurement of staff through Employment Exchanges, procedure for the receipt of dak in the Central Registry, procedure for the diarising and allocation of dak, delays in the supply of stationery and forms, etc. Separate studies have also been made in specific cases referred to the Division by the Ministries.

The services of the Central O & M Division have also been availed of by some Universities in re-organising their administration. In 1957, at the request of the Vice-Chancellor of the Jammu and Kashmir University, an officer of the O & M Division was sent to examine the working of the office of that University and to advise regarding the changes considered necessary. The assistance rendered by the officer was much appreciated by the University authorities.

At the request of the University Grants Commission, officers of the O & M Division have very recently inspected

the offices of the Delhi University, the Mysore University, the Bombay University, the Madras University and the Sri Venkateswara University (Tirupati). The assistance rendered in each case has been greatly appreciated by the University authorities.

## VII

I have indicated to you briefly the broad lines on which the O & M has been working in the Government of India during the last six years. According to the first Annual Report of the Division, it was created "with the aim of initiating and sustaining a concerted effort to improve administrative efficiency in all branches of the Government of India". The question that may naturally be asked is whether, and to what extent, it has succeeded in its objective. It is difficult to answer this question in precise and specific terms. The O & M Division has succeeded in standardising the main procedures observed in the different Ministries in the transaction of Government business. The procedures which were in force previously have been rationalised and systematised. Through the introduction of a system of regular periodical inspections of the sections, first, the deterioration in the speed and quality of disposal of work which had set in during the war years was arrested and thereafter a steady improvement has been made in the speed and quality of the disposal of work. Efficiency-consciousness has been introduced to a greater and greater extent among officials at all levels. A machinery has been created for detecting delays in the disposal of work. A steady pressure is being exerted now on all officials to speed up the disposal of cases. In order to raise the efficiency of the staff, schemes of training have been initiated, particularly for officials in the lower grades. The devolution of responsibility and financial and administrative powers all down the line has been encouraged with consequent speeding up of the disposal of cases. Organisational reforms, such as level-jumping, the creation of Pilot Sections, etc., the modification of recruitment and promotion rules and so on, have been carried out to expedite the movement of files to the decision-making

levels. Also a number of procedural reforms have been made to reduce the delays which were previously occurring or to remove hardships which were being experienced either by members of the public or the staff. The O & M Division has also carried out special studies of work methods and procedures with a view to modifying them in such a way as to enable the existing staff to handle large volume of work.

Recently, the work of this Division came up for review on the suggestion of the Estimates Committee who felt that there was no justification for maintaining the Special Re-organisation Unit in the Ministry of Finance and the O & M Organisation in the Cabinet Secretariat as distinct units and recommended that the two should be combined and placed under unified control as to enable the combined organisation to effect speedily economy consistent with efficiency. After carefully considering these recommendations, the Government have come to the conclusion that the objectives of the O & M Directorate and the S.R.U. are similar and complementary but not identical and each performs work of a distinctive character. Work study done by the S.R.U. implies a study of organisational structure that gives rise to work, scheduling of work, procedures for carrying it out and staff measurement standards after work simplification has been undertaken. During the process, other aspects than staffing also came under study. It is, therefore, necessary that the staff carrying out the work studies should form part of the Finance Ministry. On the other hand, the O & M Division is concerned with the day-to-day functioning of the Secretariat with a view to efficient despatch of business and has, therefore, to be in close touch with the Cabinet Secretariat. The location of the two units has been determined solely with a view to facilitating work. As both the units cover practically the same organisation on various aspects of the administration, it has been considered desirable to place them under the same officer to obviate duplication of work. Accordingly, Shri Indarjit Singh, who is Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Finance in charge of the Special Reorganisation Unit and Secretary to the Committee on Plan Projects,

has been appointed as Director, O & M Division, in the Cabinet Secretariat. It is now planned to intensify the O & M efforts considerably during the current year in close collaboration with the S.R.U. and Committee on Plan Projects. The O & M in the Government of India has, by and large, been fulfilling satisfactorily its function of initiating and sustaining a concerted effort to improve the administrative efficiency in all branches of Governmental machinery. It now looks forward to facing the future with confidence.

## VIII

A few words may be said about what should be done to develop an O & M attitude to work, so essential to every successful person—be he an executive or an administrator today. You are all senior officers of the Government of India in the Military Lands and Cantonment Service and have each an office to administer on your own. If you take lively interest in the work to see that the present-day work, which in your opinion may be all right, is bettered by your imprint on it, you can be sure of results. Your attitude should of course be one of challenge, *i.e.*, understanding but not of accusing, one of persuasion but not command, and one of convincing but not of inflicting your views. You must yourself develop a certain amount of inquisitiveness in finding out answers to six questions:

- (i) What? — What is being done?
- (ii) Why? — Why is the particular activity necessary for achieving the purpose ascertained by answer to Question (i)?
- (iii) Who? — Who does the work? Is he the correct person with reference to his qualification and experience? Can't it be done by a person of lower grade?
- (iv) Where? — Where is the work done? Should it be done there or can it be shifted down the line? Should it be done in

each place or ~~certain~~ for the organisation as a whole?

- (v) When? — When is the work done? Is it the correct stage in the whole process—too early or too late?
- (vi) How? — How is the work done? Here the methods of the individual, the movement of work, the equipment used, the supervision that is given—all these come in for review.

With this broad approach of striving and seeking to find, but not to yield, I am quite sure you will be able to find avenues for making continuous improvement to your own satisfaction and to the increased utility of your services to Government.

Let me conclude by emphasising that the whole object of O & M, again in Shri Radhakrishnan's words, is "to effect improvement and not to find fault. It is concerned with the future rather than the past. It is an effort to give to the taxpayer more value for his money":



